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SUBJECT: NORTHWEST BAGHDAD RECONCILIATION: SUCCESSES AND COMPLEXITIES

REF: BAGHDAD 3752

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Andrew Passen for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (U) This is a Baghdad embedded PRT 5 and Baghdad PRT reporting cable.

¶2. (C) Introduction: Reconciliation in Baghdad requires locally-tailored approaches. In the predominantly rural Abu Ghraib Qada (county) of Baghdad Province, sustaining reconciliation momentum demands a delicate balancing act. Rival tribes are competing to maintain and expand influence while dealing with sectarian differences and fighting extremists and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). They are hesitant to cooperate fully with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and other elements of a government that they feel does not support them and/or victimizes them. Despite these challenges, progress in bringing these elements together under "one tent" continues. End introduction.

¶3. (C) Summary: On December 6, 1/1 CAV Commander COL Funk and embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (ePRT-5) Leader Tom Burke facilitated the "Northwest Baghdad Security Summit II" in Abu Ghraib. Following the success of previous reconciliation events (reftel), 1/1 CAV and ePRT-5 orchestrated this event to highlight six months of improved security in Abu Ghraib, promote continued cooperation between local tribes and ISF, and push for an increase in government essential services in the region. Hosting the event was local powerbroker Abu Azam, whose growing influence garnered participation at the summit from powerful tribes in northwestern Baghdad Province as well as parts of Anbar and Babil Provinces. Underlying tensions between rival tribes, ISF and Coalition Forces were apparent, as were concerns about the effectiveness of the Government of Iraq (GOI). Yet all came together under one tent in support of reconciliation -- a major step toward strengthening tribal relations, their cooperation with ISF and Coalition Forces, and their link with the local, provincial, and national governments and, in some cases, reconciliation within their tribes. End summary.

Fourth Successful Reconciliation Summit In Northwestern Baghdad

¶4. (U) The summit was the fourth successful gathering of tribal sheikhs in northwestern Baghdad Province. The event was hosted by Abu Ghraib powerbroker Abu Azam in the Nasr Wa Salaam community on the western fringe of Abu Ghraib. (Note: Thamer Kaddam Zaidon, aka Abu Azam, is a former 1920 Revolutionary Brigade leader who has substantial sway in northwestern Baghdad and beyond. He played a prominent role in organizing Concerned Local Citizens and in reconciliation throughout the area. End note.) Held at an Iraqi Police compound during a sand storm, tribal sheikhs from the Zobai (Sunni), Mashhedani (Sunni), Jabouri (Sunni) and Tamimi (mostly Shia) tribes from northwestern and western Baghdad were keynote speakers. In addition, tribal leaders from as

far away as Fallujah in Anbar Province to the west and Babil Province to the south also attended and spoke at the event. Participating from the GOI were representatives from the Iraqi Follow-up Committee on National Reconciliation (IFCNR), the Iraqi Police, the Baghdad Provincial Council, and Abu Ghraib, Taji, and Tarmiya local governments. In total some 750 invitees attended the summit, which was well-covered by local and national media outlets. End background.

Reconciliation Improves Security, While Government Services Remain Problematic

¶15. (U) The summit successfully reinforced the security gains from reconciliation in northwestern Baghdad and promoted dialogue between tribal, local government, and ISF leaders on service needs in the region, interactions that strengthen the link between the local and provincial governments, and with the GoI and tribal elements. The first speaker, MG Adnan from the IFCNR, focused on a major theme: "It is imperative that the GoI place emphasis on the return of essential services to the region." Baghdad Provincial Council Rural Services Committee Chairman Mashhedani noted that the summit is an important first step in starting the conversation with the GoI, reiterated his office's support for improved services to the people of northwestern Baghdad, and stressed the need for assistance from the service ministries. The newly-elected Abu Ghraib Qa'im Makam Safeh noted that instead of security, the return of essential services through good governance is the primary concern of local people. (Note: A Qa'im Makam is the rough equivalent to a local mayor. End Note.) He called upon all tribal leaders to "join and rebuild" local government, and made a plea for private investors to return and help rebuild the local economy.

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Across the board, attendees applauded the positive steps forward, but noted their hope that the next stage would bring better results from the GoI. Many specifically requested 1/1 CAV and ePRT facilitate smaller meeting that allow the local Tribal Council to provide pointed input to the various technical ministries.

Amidst Talk of "One Iraq," Tensions Remain

¶16. (C) Although successful on the surface, underlying tension between certain tribes and the GoI and between those tribes and Coalition Forces were visible. Tribal leaders publicly stated their displeasure with ISF and Coalition Forces over detainee issues and advocated general amnesty, with some references made to "occupying forces." Karim Isma'il Husayn Al Zobai (aka Abu Maroof), a prominent sheikh with influence in Anbar Province and southern Abu Ghraib, demanded detainees be released from the "jails of the GoI and occupying forces" and granted amnesty, while echoing the call to tribal unity against AQI. (Note: Abu Maroof is a rival of Abu Azam and is leading efforts to establish an all-Sunni "Baghdad Brigade," which now involves the IFCNR. Also a former 1920 Revolutionary Brigade member, he wore the insurgent group's insignia during his speech. End note.)

Comment - Under the Same Tent but Not on the Same Page

¶17. (C) Comment: A larger number of mixed-sect, public, well-attended events like this summit have taken place in Northwestern Baghdad, which includes the Taji and Abu Ghraib qadas, than in any other district in Baghdad Province. As a result, this USG reconciliation initiative has exposed dynamics of tribal politics less apparent in reconciliation efforts that are still in their earlier stages. The summit revealed, for instance, the complexity and precarious nature of tribal relationships within Abu Ghraib, and between those tribes and others in Taji and Tarmiya qadas extending west into Anbar Province. These tribal groups have begun to use

reconciliation efforts to jockey for power and territorial gains. Although tribal leaders rhetorically echoed the theme of "One Iraq" alongside Coalition Forces and ISF at the summit, subtle gestures offering support for one leader vice another abounded. One speaker even appeared to be wearing a Ba'ath Party uniform, while others wore other insignia to indicate primary loyalty to a particular tribe or faction. Throughout the event, tribal keynote speakers approached the stage with robust security teams seemingly more intent to convey their patrons' prestige than to provide security -- this dynamic was most pronounced with the host, Abu Azam. These actions reflect the "usual power plays" among tribal leaders, however, and not sectarian-driven agendas, according to Provincial Council Rural Services Chairman Mashhedani, who privately relayed his observations to PRToff.

¶18. (C) Comment c'ted: Tribal groupings, GoI, and ISF all stood together publicly in support of "One Iraq," but the tribes made clear that GoI officials must provide essential services as a quid pro quo for the government to receive recognition outside Baghdad's urban core. Thus while local reconciliation initiatives have eased communal infighting, "reconciliation" in northwestern Baghdad has moved past the phase where merely getting contentious parties under the same tent is enough. Summit participants demanded issue-specific, follow-on meetings that lead to tangible results for their communities. The local leaders made clear national, provincial, and local levels of government must act now to enhance their legitimacy with local Iraqis through the provision of services, before calls for unity return to cries for action against the GoI.

¶19. (C) Comment c'ted: Fortunately, the open dialogue and honest exchanges that took place at this summit suggest that such action is possible; although underlying rivalries and tensions remain, a level of civility and restraint have emerged in areas such as Abu Ghraib. Local Brigade Combat Teams and ePRTs will continue to exploit this civility to facilitate more dialogue between local residents and various levels of the GoI, and to spur greater GoI involvement, particularly in the provision of services. End Comment.
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